Washington, DC—U.S. Congressman Mike Pence (R-IN) and U.S. Congressman Greg Walden (R-OR) introduced the bipartisan Broadcaster Freedom Act today with 115 original cosponsors. The bill would prevent the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) from reinstating the Fairness Doctrine, which would suppress free speech by requiring the government to monitor political views and decide what constitutes fair political discourse.

"The American people cherish freedom, especially freedom of speech and of the press. Bringing back the Fairness Doctrine would amount to government control over political views expressed on the public airways," said Pence, a former broadcaster. "We must pass the Broadcaster Freedom Act and bury the Fairness Doctrine once and for all."

"The Fairness Doctrine represents an assault on the fundamental freedoms included in the First Amendment," said Walden, who owned and operated radio stations with his wife in Hood River and The Dalles, Oregon, for nearly 22 years. "Called the Fairness Doctrine or a code name like localism, this kind of outdated government regulation of political speech has no place in the modern broadcasting landscape."

Background

The Fairness Doctrine is a 1940's-era censorship policy that mandates competing viewpoints be offered on the airwaves on controversial topics. Not until its repeal in the 1980s did religious broadcasters and political personalities on the left and right have the freedom from the federal government to practice their First Amendment rights on the airwaves.

The Fairness Doctrine existed in a media landscape much different than the one we inhabit today. When first enforced in 1949, only 2,881 radio stations existed. Today, that number is around 14,000. Likewise, the number of television and Internet outlets available to the consumer has grown exponentially. The scarcity argument has never been weaker.

Pence, a former radio talk show host, and Walden, a radio station owner, introduced the Broadcaster Freedom Act in the 111th Congress.